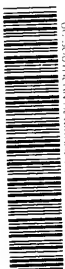


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THE RHYTHM OF LIFE






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The Wisdom of the East Series

EDITED BY

L. CRANMER-BYNG

Dr. S. A. KAPADIA

THE RHYTHM OF LIFE



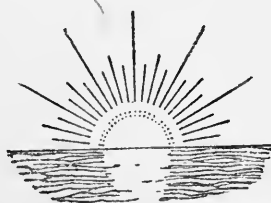
WISDOM OF THE EAST

THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

BASED ON THE PHILOSOPHY
OF LAO-TSE

TRANSLATED BY M. E. REYNOLDS

FROM THE DUTCH
OF
HENRI BOREL.



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

1921



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P R E F A C E

THE following study on Lao-Tse's "Wu-Wei" should not be regarded as a translation or even as a free rendering of the actual work of that philosopher. I have simply tried to retain in my work the pure essence of his thought, and only in isolated instances have I given a literal translation even of his essential truths, the rest being for the most part a self-evolved elaboration of the few principles expressed by him.

My reading of the terms "Tao" and "Wu-Wei" is entirely different from that of most sinologues (such as Stanislas Julien, Giles, and Legge), who have translated the work "Tao-Teh-King." But this is not the place to justify myself. It may best be judged from the following work whether my conception be reasonable or incorrect.

Little is contained in Lao-Tse's short, extremely simple book, the words of which may be said

to be condensed into their purely primary significance—(a significance at times quite at variance with that given in other works to the same words*)—but this little is gospel. Lao-Tse's work is no treatise on philosophy, but contains merely those essential truths to which his unwritten philosophy had led him. In it we find no forms nor theories, nothing but the quintessence of this philosophy.

My work is permeated with this essence, but it is no translation of Lao-Tse. None of my metaphorical comparisons, such as that with the landscape, the sea, or the clouds, are anywhere to be found in Lao-Tse's work. Neither has he anywhere spoken of Art, nor specially of Love. In writing of all this I have spoken aloud the thoughts and feelings instinctively induced by the perusal of Lao-Tse's deep-felt philosophy. Thus it may be that my work contains far more of myself than I am conscious of; but even so, it is but an outpouring of the thought and feeling called up in me by the words of Lao-Tse.

I have made use of none but *Chinese* works on Lao-Tse, and of those only a few. On reading later some of the English and French translations,

* By Confucius, for instance.

I was amazed to find how confused and unintelligible these books were.

I adhered to my simple idea of Lao-Tse's work, and of my own work I could alter nothing, for I felt the truth of it within me as a simple, natural faith.

HENRI BOREL.

NOTE

THIS little book was first published some years ago by Messrs. Luzac, under the title of "Wu-Wei," and has been long out of print. The present version has been largely rewritten in a simpler style and subjected to much careful revision by the translator.



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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

L. CRANMER-BYNG.
S. A. KAPADIA.

NORTHBROOK SOCIETY,
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KENSINGTON, S.W.

TAO

The numbers in the text refer to notes by the author,
which will be found at the end of the book.

M. E. R.

CHAPTER I

TAO

I WAS standing in the Temple of Shien Shan, on an islet in the Chinese Sea, distant a few hours' journey from the harbour of Hā Tó.

To the westward rose two mountain ranges interweaving their soft outlines behind the island. To the eastward shimmered the endless Ocean. High up, rock-supported, stood the Temple, in the shadow of broad Buddha-trees.

The island is rarely visited, but sometimes fisher-folk, fleeing before the threatening typhoon, anchor there when they have no further hope of reaching the harbour. Why the Temple exists in this lonely spot, no one knows; but the lapse of centuries has established its holy right to stand there. Strangers arrive but seldom, and there are only a hundred poor inhabitants, or thereabouts, who live there simply because their ancestors did so before them. I had gone thither in the hope of finding some man of a

serious bent of mind with whom to study. I had explored the temples and convents of the neighbourhood for more than a year, in search of earnest-minded priests capable of telling me what I was unable to learn from the superficial books on Chinese religion ; but I found nothing but ignorant, stupid creatures everywhere—kneeling to idols whose symbolical significance they did not understand, and reciting strange “ Sutras ” not one word of which was intelligible to them.¹ And I had been obliged to draw all my information from badly-translated works, that had received even worse treatment at the hands of learned Europeans than at those of the literary Chinese whom I had consulted. At last, however, I had heard an old Chinaman speak of “ the Sage of Shien Shan ” as of one well versed in the secrets of Heaven and Earth ; and—without cherishing any great expectations, it is true—I had crossed the water to seek him out.

This Temple resembled many others that I had seen. Grimy priests lounged on the steps in dirty-grey garments, and stared at me with senseless grins. The figures of “ Kwan Yin ” and “ Cakyamuni ” and “ Sam-Pao-Fu ” had been newly restored, and blazed with all imaginable

crude colours that completely marred their former beauty. The floor was covered with dirt and dust, and pieces of orange-peel and sugar-cane were strewn about. A thick and heavy atmosphere oppressed my breast.

Addressing one of the priests, I said :

" I have come to see the old philosopher. Does not an old hermit live here, who is called after ' Lao-Tse ' ? "

With a wondering face he answered :

" Lao-Tse lives in the topmost hut on the cliffs. But he does not like barbarians."

I asked him quietly :

" Will you take me to him, Bikshu, for a dollar ? "

He looked up greedily, but shook his head, saying :

" I dare not ; seek him yourself."

The other priests grinned, and offered me tea, in the hope of " tips."

I left them, and climbed the rocks, reaching the top in half an hour ; and there I found a little square, stone hut. I knocked at the door, and, shortly after, heard some one draw back a bolt.

The hermit stood before me, gazing at me.

It was a revelation.

I seemed to see a great light—a light not dazzling, but calming.

He stood before me tall and straight as a palm-tree. His face was peaceful as a calm evening, in the hush of the trees, and the still moonlight ; his whole person breathed the majesty of nature, un-self-conscious in its beauty as a mountain or a cloud. From him there radiated the very soul of prayer ; such a soul as dwells in the after-gleam on a twilit landscape.

I felt uneasy under his deep gaze, and saw my own poor life revealed in all its pettiness. I had not a word to say, but could only stand silent in that radiant presence.

He raised his hand with a gesture like the movement of a swaying flower, and held it out to me—heartily—frankly. When he spoke, his voice was soft music, like the sound of the wind in the trees :

“I greet you, stranger ! What do you seek of me ?—old man that I am ! ”

“I seek a master,” I answered humbly, “to show me the way of human goodness. I have searched this beautiful land for a long time, but the people seem as though they were dead, and I am as helpless as ever.”

"That is not as it should be," said the sage. "Do not strive so busily to be so very good. Do not seek it overmuch, or you will never find the true wisdom. Do you not know the story of how the Yellow Emperor² recovered his magic pearl? I will tell you."

"The Yellow Emperor once went on a journey. He travelled round the north of the Red Sea, and climbed to the summit of the Kuenlün mountains. On his return to the southward he lost his magic pearl. He besought his wits to find it, but in vain. He besought his sight to find it, but in vain. He besought his eloquence to find it, but that also was in vain. His last appeal was to Nothing, and by Nothing it was restored. 'How strange!' he cried, 'that Nothing should be able to recover it!' Do you understand me, young man?"

"I think this pearl was his soul," I answered, "and that knowledge, sight, and speech do but cloud the soul rather than enlighten it; and that it was only in the peace of perfect quietude that his soul's consciousness was restored to the Yellow Emperor. Is it so, Master?"

"Quite right; you have felt it as it is. And do you know, too, by whom this beautiful legend is told?"

"I am young and ignorant; I do not know."

"It is by Chuang-Tse, the disciple of Lao-Tse, China's greatest philosopher. It was neither Confucius nor Mencius who spoke the purest wisdom in this country, but Lao-Tse. He was the greatest, and Chuang-Tse was his apostle. You foreigners cherish, I know, a certain well-meaning admiration for Lao-Tse too, but I think but few of you know that he was the purest human being who ever breathed. Have you read the 'Tao-Teh-King'? and have you ever considered, I wonder, what he meant by 'Tao'?"

"I should be grateful indeed if you would tell me, Master."

"I think I may gladly help you, young man. I have had no pupil for many years; and I see in your eyes no curiosity, but rather a pure desire of wisdom, for the freeing of your soul. Listen, then: "

"Tao is really nothing but that which you Westerners call 'God.' Tao is the One; the beginning and the end. It embraces all things, and to It all things return.

"Lao-Tse wrote at the beginning of his book the sign: Tao. But what he actually meant

—the Highest, the One—can have no name, can never be expressed in any sound, just because it is The One. Equally inadequate is your term ‘God.’ Wu—Nothing—that is Tao. You do not understand me?—Listen further! There exists, then, an absolute Reality—without beginning, without end—which we cannot comprehend, and which therefore must be to us as Nothing. That which we *are* able to comprehend, which has for us a relative reality, is in truth only appearance. It is an outgrowth, a result of absolute reality, seeing that everything emanates from, and returns to, that reality. But things which are real to us are not real in themselves. What we call Being is in fact Not-Being, and just what we call Not-Being is Being in its true sense. So that we are living in a great obscurity. What we imagine to be real is not real, and yet emanates from the real, for the Real is the Whole. Both Being and Not-Being are accordingly Tao. But above all never forget that ‘Tao’ is merely a sound uttered by a human being, and that *the idea is essentially inexpressible*. All things appreciable to the senses, and all cravings of the heart, are unreal. Tao is the source of Heaven and Earth. One begat Two,

Two begat Three, Three begat Millions. And Millions return again into One.

“If you remember this well, young man, you have passed the first gateway on the path of Wisdom.

“You know, then, that Tao is the source of everything : of the trees, the flowers, the birds ; of the sea, the desert, and the rocks ; of light and darkness ; of heat and cold ; of day and night ; of life and death ; of summer and winter, and of your own being. Worlds and Oceans evaporate into Eternity. Man rises out of the darkness, laughs in the glimmering light, and disappears. But in all these changes the One is manifested. Tao is in everything. Your soul in her innermost is Tao.

“Behold the world before you, young man ! . . .”

With a stately gesture he pointed seawards. The mountains on both sides stood fast, uncompromising, clear-set in the atmosphere—like strong thoughts petrified, hewn out by conscious energy—yielding only in the distance to the tender influence of light and air. On a very high point stood a lonely little tree, of delicate leafage, against the light. The evening began to fall,

with tender serenity ; and a rosy glow, dreamy yet bright, lent the blue mountains, outlined with ever-growing sharpness against it, an air of joyous peace. In it all was to be felt a gentle upwardstriving, a still poising, as of a conscious soaring towards piety. And the sea crept up softly, with a still-swaying slide—with the quiet, irresistible approach of a type of infinity. The sail of a little vessel, gleaming softly golden, glided nearer. So tiny it looked on that immense ocean—so fearless and lovely ! All was pure—no trace of foulness anywhere.

And I spoke with the rare impulse of a mighty joy.

“ Master, I feel it now ! That which I look for is everywhere. I had no need to seek it afar off ; for it is quite close to me. It is everywhere—what I seek, what I myself am, what my soul is. It is familiar as my own self. It is all revelation ! God is everywhere ! Tao is in everything ! ”

“ That is so, boy, but you must not confuse it ! In that which you see is Tao, but Tao is not what you see. You must not think that Tao is visible to your eyes. Tao will neither waken joy in your heart nor draw your tears. For all your experiences and emotions are relative and not real.

“ But I will speak no more of that at present. You stand now only at the first gate, and see but the first glint of dawn. It is already much that you should realize Tao as present in everything. It will make your life more natural and confident ; for, believe me, you lie as safely in Tao as a child in the arms of its mother. And it will lend you dignity, for you will feel your life, in all places, to be as holy an office as that of a good priest in his temple. You will no longer be scared by the changes in things, by life and death ; for you know that death, as well as life, emanates from Tao. And it is but natural that Tao, which pervaded your life, should continually surround you after death, also.

“ See the landscape before you ! The trees, the mountains, the sea, they are your brothers, like the air and the light. Watch the sea approaching us ! So spontaneously, so naturally, so purely ‘ because so it must be.’ See your sister, the little tree on yonder point, bending towards you ! and the simple movement of her little leaves !

“ Now I will speak to you of Wu-Wei,⁵ of ‘ non-resistance,’ of ‘ self-movement ’ on the breath of impulse born out of Tao. Men would be true

men if they would but let their lives flow of themselves, as the sea heaves, as a flower blooms, in the simple beauty of Tao. In every man there is an impulse which, proceeding from Tao, would urge him back to Tao again. But men grow blind through their own senses and lusts. They strive for pleasure, desire, hate, fame and riches. Their movements are fierce and stormy, their progress a series of wild uprisings and violent falls. They hold fast to all that is unreal. They desire too many things to allow of their desiring the One. They desire, too, to be wise and good, and that is worst of all. They desire to know too much.

“The one remedy is : the return to the source whence they sprang. In us is Tao. Tao is rest. Only by renunciation of desire—even the desire for goodness or wisdom—can we attain rest. Oh ! all this craving to know what Tao is ! And this pitiable struggle for words in which to express it and to inquire after it ! The truly wise follow the Teaching which is wordless—which remains unexpressed.* And who shall ever express it ? Those who know it (what Tao is) tell it not ; those who tell it, know it not.’ Even I shall not tell you what Tao is. You yourself must dis-

cover it by freeing yourself from all your passions and cravings, and living spontaneously, void of unnatural striving. You must approach Tao gently, with a motion reposeful as the movement of that wide ocean. That moves, not because it chooses to move, nor because it knows that it is wise or good to move ; it moves involuntarily, unconscious of movement. Thus lightly floating will you also return into Tao, and when you are returned you will know it not, for you yourself will be Tao."

He ceased speaking, and looked at me gently. His eyes shone with a quiet light, still and even as the tint of the heavens.

"Father," I said, "what you say is beautiful and natural as Nature itself ; but surely it is not so easy—this strifeless, inactive absorption of man into Tao ?"

"Do not confuse the sense of my words," he replied. "By strifelessness—Wu-Wei—Lao-Tse did not mean mere inaction—not mere idling, with closed eyes. He meant : relaxation from earthly activity, from desire—from the craving for unreal things. But he *did* exact activity in *real* things. He implied a powerful movement of the soul, which must be freed from its

gloomy body like a bird from its cage. He meant a yielding to the inner motive-force which we derive from Tao and which leads us to Tao again. And, believe me: this movement is as natural as that of the cloud above us."

High in the blue ether over our heads were golden clouds, sailing slowly towards the sea. They gleamed with a wonderful purity, as of a high and holy love. Softly, dreamily, they melted away.

"In a little while they will be gone, vanished in the infinity of the heavens," said the hermit, "and you will see nothing but the eternal blue. Thus will your soul be absorbed into Tao."

"My life is full of sins," I answered; "I am heavily burdened with darkening desires. And so are my benighted fellow-men. How can such life as ours ever float towards Tao in pure and spiritual essence? It is so heavy with evil, it must surely sink back into the mire."

"Do not believe it!" he cried, with a little laugh full of love and kindness. "No man can annihilate Tao, and there shines in each one of us the inextinguishable light of the soul. Do not believe the wickedness of humanity to

be so great and so mighty ! The eternal Tao dwells in all ; in murderers and harlots, as in philosophers and poets. All bear within them an indestructible treasure, and not one is better than another. You may not love the one in preference to the other ; you cannot bless the one and damn the other. They are as alike in essence as two grains of sand on this rock. And not one will be banished out of Tao eternally, for all bear Tao within them. Their sins are illusive as vapours. Their deeds are a false manifestation ; and their words pass away like ephemeral dreams. They cannot be ' bad,' they cannot be ' good ' either. Irresistibly they are drawn to Tao, as yonder waterdrop to the great sea. It may take longer with some than with others, that is all. And a few centuries—what matter they, in the face of Eternity ? Poor friend ! Has your sin made you so fearful ? Have you held your sin to be mightier than Tao ? Have you held the sin of men to be mightier than Tao ? You have striven too hard to be good, and have seen your own misdoings in too glaring a light ! You have exacted too much goodness from your fellow-men, so their sin, too, has unduly troubled you. But all this is only

appearance. Tao is neither good nor bad. For Tao is real. Tao alone *is*; and the life of all unreal things is a life of false contrasts and relations, which have no independent existence, and mislead greatly. So, above all, do not desire to be good, nor call yourself bad. You must be Wu-Wei—unstriving, self-impelled. Not bad—not good; not little—and not great; not low—and not high. And only then will you truly *be*, when, in the ordinary sense, you *are not*. When once you are free from all your seeming, from all your craving and lusting, then you will move of yourself, without so much as knowing that you move; and this, your only true life-principle—this free, untrammelled motion towards Tao—will be light and unconscious as the gliding of the little cloud above you.”

I experienced a sudden sense of freedom. The feeling was not joy—not happiness. It was rather a gentle sense of expansion—a widening of my mental horizon.

“Father,” I said, “I thank you! This revelation of Tao lends me already an impulse which, though I cannot explain it, yet seems to bear me gently forward.

“How wonderful is Tao! With all my wisdom,

with all my knowledge, I have never felt this before ! ”

“ Check this craving for wisdom ! ” said the Master. “ Renounce the desire for too much knowledge, and you shall grow, later, to know intuitively. The knowledge acquired by unnatural striving only leads away from Tao. Do not strive to know everything about the men and things around you, nor, more especially, concerning their relations and antagonisms. Above all, do not seek happiness too greedily, and do not fear unhappiness. For neither of these is real. Joy is not real, nor pain either. Tao would not be Tao, were you able to picture it to yourself as pain, as joy, as happiness or unhappiness ; for Tao is One Whole, and in it no discords may exist. Hear how simply it is expressed by Chuang Tse : ‘ The greatest joy is no joy. ’ And pain too will have vanished for you ! You must never believe pain to be a real thing, an essential element of existence. Your pain will one day vanish as the mists vanish from the mountains. For one day you will realize how natural, how spontaneous, are all facts of existence ; and all the great problems which have held for you mystery and darkness will become Wu-Wei, quite simple,

non-resistant, no longer a source of marvel to you. For everything grows out of Tao, everything is a natural part of the great system developed from a single principle. Then, nothing will have power to trouble you nor to 'rejoice' you more. You will laugh no more, neither will you weep. I see you look up doubtfully, as though you found me too hard, too cold. Nevertheless, when you are somewhat further advanced you will realize that *this* it means, to be in perfect sympathy with Tao. Then, looking upon 'pain,' you will know that one day it must disappear, because it is unreal; and looking upon 'joy,' you will understand that it is but a primitive and shadowy joy, dependent upon time and circumstance, and deriving its apparent existence from contrast with pain. Looking upon a goodly man, you will find it wholly natural that he should be as he is, and will realize how much goodlier he will be in that day when he shall no longer represent the 'kind' and 'good.' And upon a murderer you will look with all calmness, with neither special love nor special hate; for he is your fellow in Tao, and all his sin is powerless to annihilate Tao within him. Then, for the first time, when you are Wu-Wei at last—not existing, in the common

sense of the word—all will be well with you, and you will glide through your life as quietly and naturally as this great sea before our eyes. Nothing will ruffle your peace. Your sleep shall be dreamless, and your consciousness shall bring you no care.⁸ You will see Tao in all things, be one with all existence, and look on the whole of Nature as on something intimately familiar as your self. And passing with calm acceptance through the changes of day and night, summer and winter, life and death, you will one day enter into Tao, where there is no more change, and whence you once issued, pure as on your return.”

“ Father, what you say is so clear—I must believe it. But life is still so dear to me, and I am afraid of death ; I am afraid too lest my friends should die, or my wife, or my child ! Death seems to me so black and gloomy—and life is bright—bright—with the sun, and the green and flowery earth ! ”

“ That is because you fail as yet to feel the perfect naturalness of death, which is equal in reality to that of life. You think too much of the insignificant body, and the deep grave in which it must lie ; but that is the feeling of a prisoner about to

be freed, who is troubled at the thought of leaving the dark cell where he has lived so long. You see death in contrast to life ; and both are unreal—both are a changing and a seeming. Your soul does but glide out of a familiar sea into an unfamiliar ocean. That which is real in you, your soul, can never pass away, and this fear is no part of her. You must conquer this fear for ever ; or, better still, it will happen, when you are older, and have lived spontaneously and naturally, following the motions of Tao, that you will of your own accord cease to feel it. Then you will mourn no longer for those who have gone home before you ; and one day you will be reunited to them, but without realizing it, because contrasts such as meeting and parting will no longer exist for you.

“ When Chuang-Tse’s wife died, the widower was found by Hui-Tse sitting calmly upon the ground, passing the time, as was his wont, in beating upon a gong. When Hui-Tse rallied him upon his seeming indifference, Chuang-Tse replied :

“ ‘ Thine is an unnatural way of looking at things. At first, it is true, I was troubled—I could not be otherwise. But after some pondering I reflected that originally she was not of this

life at all, being not only not born, but without form altogether; and that no life-germ had as yet penetrated into this formlessness. That, nevertheless, life-energy then began to stir, as in a sun-warmed furrow; that out of life-energy grew form, and form became birth. To-day another change has completed itself, and she has died. This resembles the rise and fall of the four seasons: spring, autumn, winter, summer. She sleeps calmly in the Great House. Were I now to weep and wail, it were to act as though the soul of all this had not entered into me—therefore I do it no more.' ”

He told this in a simple, unaffected manner that showed how natural it seemed to him. But it was not yet clear to me, and I said:

“I find this wisdom terrible; it almost makes me afraid. Life would seem to me so cold and empty, were I as wise as this.”

“Life is cold and empty,” he answered, quietly, but with no trace of contempt in his tone; “and men are as deceptive as life itself. There is not one who knows himself, not one who knows his fellows; and yet they are all alike. There is, in fact, no such thing as ‘life’; it is unreal.”

I could say no more, and stared before me into the twilight. The mountains—a wonderful, tender bloom upon them—were sleeping peacefully, lying, as it were, in childlike humility, beneath the vast, vast sky. Below us was an indistinct twinkling of little red lights. From the distance rose a sad monotonous song, the wail of a flute accompanying it. In the depths of the darkness lay the sea in its majesty, and the sound of infinitude swelled far and wide.

Then there arose in me a great sadness, and my eyes filled, as with passionate insistence I asked him :

“ And what of friendship, then ? and what of love ? ”

He looked at me. I could not see him plainly in the darkness, but there shone from his eyes a curious, soft light, and he answered gently :

“ These are the best things in life, by very far. They are one with the first stirring of Tao within you. But one day you will know as little of them as the stream knows of its banks when it is lost in the ocean. Do not think I would teach you to banish love from your heart ; for that would be to go against Tao. Love what you love, and do not be misled by the thought that love is a

hindrance holding you in bondage. To banish love from your heart would be a mad and earthly action, and would put you further away from Tao than you have ever been. I say only, that love will one day vanish of itself without your knowing, and that Tao is not Love. But do not forget that—so far as I wish it, and so far as it is good for you—I am speaking to you of the very highest things. Were I only speaking of this life and of men I should say : Love is the highest of all. But for him who is absorbed again into Tao, love is a thing past and forgotten.

“ Now, it has grown late, and I must not tell you too much all at once. You will surely wish to sleep within the Temple, and I will prepare it all for you. Come with me—and descend the mountain carefully ! ”

He lit a little light, and held out his hand to lead me. Slowly we proceeded, step by step. He was as careful of me as though I had been his child ; he lighted my path at every steep descent, and led me gently forward, taking heed of all my movements.

When we arrived at the foot, he showed me the little guest-chamber set apart for mandarins,¹⁰ and fetched pillow and covering for me.

“ I thank you, Father, from my heart ! ” I said. “ When shall I ever be able to show my gratitude ? ”

He looked at me quietly, and the look was great, like the sea. Calm he was, and tender as the night. He smiled at me, and it was like the light laughing upon the earth. And silently he left me.

ART



CHAPTER II

ART

“WHAT is art ?” I asked the hermit. “What is poetry ?”

We were sitting on the mountain-side, in the shadow of an overhanging rock. Before us stretched the sea—one endless gleam of light in the sunshine. Golden sails were driving quietly over it ; white seagulls swept in noble curvings lightly to and fro ; and great, snow-pure clouds, gathering in the blue, sailed by in majestic procession.

“It is as natural as the sea—the birds—the clouds,” he answered. “I do not think you will find this so hard to realise as Tao. To know it, you have only to look round you—upon the earth, into the air. Poetry has existed as long as heaven and earth.”¹¹

“Beauty was born with the heavens and the earth. The sun, the moon, and the red mists of morning and evening illumine each other ; yet the inexhaustible and wonderful changes presented by these great phenomena of Nature are created without the help of dye or pigment.

“ All phenomena of the world bring forth sound when set in motion, and every sound implies some motion which has caused it. The greatest of all sounds are wind and thunder.

“ Listen to the mountain stream racing over the rocks ! As soon as it is set in motion, the sound of it—high or low, short or long—makes itself heard, not actually according to the laws of music, it is true, yet having a certain rhythm and system.

“ This is the spontaneous voice of heaven and earth ; the voice that is caused by movement.

“ And so it is that in the purest state of the human heart—when the fire of the spirit is at its brightest—then, if it be moved, that too will give forth sound. Is it not a wondrous metamorphosis that out of this should spring a literature ?

“ Poetry, then, is the sound of the heart !

“ You can see how natural this is. Poetry is to be heard and seen everywhere, for the whole of Nature is one great poet. But, just because of its naturalness, it is strict and unalterable. Where the spring of movement is, there flows the sound of the poem. Any other sound is no poetry. The sound must come quite of itself—Wu-Wei—it cannot be generated by any artifices. There

are many—how many!—who by unnatural movement force forth sound ; but these are no poets—they are more like apes and parrots. Few indeed are the true poets. From these the verse flows of itself, full of music ; powerful as the roaring of the torrent amongst the rocks, as the rolling of thunder in the clouds ; soft as the swish of an evening shower, or the gentle breath of a summer night-breeze. Hark ! hark to the sea at our feet ! Is it not singing a wondrous song ? Is it not a very poem ? Is it not pure music ? See how the waves sway, in ceaseless mobility, one after the other, one over the other—swinging onward and onward, ever further and further—returning to vanish in music once more ! Do you hear their rhythmic rushing ? Oh ! great and simple must a poet be—like the sea ! His movement, like that of the sea, is an impulse out of Tao, and in that—tranquil, strifeless, obedient as a child—must he let himself go. Great, great is the sea. Great, great is the poet. But greater—greater—is Tao, that which is not great ! ”

Then he was silent, listening to the sea, and I saw how the music of it entered into him.

I had reflected much since hearing his first

words on the subject of Tao. I was fearful lest his great and lofty philosophy should mean death to the artist, and that I too, in giving myself over to this wisdom of his, should become incapable of feeling a poet's inspiration, or a child like rapture at the sight of beauty.

But he himself was standing there in the purest ecstasy, as though he were now looking upon the sea for the first time; and reverently, with shining eyes, he listened to the rush of the waves. "Is it not beautiful?" he said again, "is it not beautiful?—this sound, that came out of Tao, the soundless!—this light, that shone out of Tao, the lightless!—and the word-music: verse, born of Tao the wordless! We live, indeed, in an endless mystery—resolving one day into absolute truth!"

I was a long time silent. But I could not grasp it yet. And I asked him doubtfully: "Is it really so easy—to make and sing poems? Surely it cannot be as easy for us to bring forth verse as for the stream to rush over the rocks? Must we not first practise and train ourselves, and learn to know the verse-forms thoroughly? And is not that voluntary action, rather than involuntary motion?"

He answered without hesitation:

“That need not perplex you. All depends on whether a man has in him the true spring from which the verse should flow, or not ; whether he has the pure impulse from Tao within him, or whether his life-motive is something less simple, less beautiful. If he *has* that source in him, he is a poet ; if he has it not, he is none. By this time you surely realize that, strictly speaking, in the highest sense, all men are poets ; for, as I have told you, there exists in all men the essential, original impulse emanating from and returning to Tao. But it is rare to find this impulse alert and strongly developed—and men are rarely able to grasp the higher revelations of beauty through which their bank-bound life-stream flows till it loses itself in eternity. One might express it thus : that ordinary men are like still water in swampy ground, in the midst of poor vegetation ; while poets are clear streams, flowing amidst the splendour of luxuriant banks to the boundless ocean. But I will not speak so metaphorically.

“You want to know whether a man who *has* the true inspiration of the poet must not, nevertheless, still train himself in his art, or whether he moves in it quite spontaneously ? The latter is the truer view ! For a young poet, having

given but a short time to the study of verse in all its variety, suddenly comes to find these forms so natural as to preclude his inclination for any other. His verse assumes beautiful form involuntarily, simply because other movement would be alien. That is just the difference between the poet and the amateur: that the poet sings his verse spontaneously, from his own impulse, and only afterwards, proving it, finds it to be right in sound—in rhythm—in all its movement; whereas the amateur, after first marking out for himself a certain form, according to the approved pattern of the art-learned, proceeds to project by main force a series of soulless words upon it. The soulful words of the poet flowed of themselves just because they were soulful. And, if we view things in their true light, there do actually exist *no* hard and fast forms for poetry, and absolutely no laws; for a verse which flows spontaneously from its source moves of itself, and is independent of all preconceived human standards! The one law is that there shall be no law. Perhaps you will find this too daring, young man! But remember that I take my illustrations from Tao, not from men, and that I know, moreover, but very few true poets. The man who is simple

and pure as Nature is rare indeed. Think you that there are many such in your own country ? ”

This unexpected question took me aback, and I wondered why he asked it. It was hard to answer, too, so I asked him first another question :

“ Master, I cannot answer until you have told me more. *Why does a poet make a poem ?* ”

Then he laughed outright, and said :

“ Why does the sea roar ? Why does the bird sing ? Do you know that, my son ? ”

“ Because they cannot help it, Father, because they simply must give their nature vent in that way ! It is Wu-Wei ! ”

“ Quite so ! Well—and why should it be different with a poet ? ”

I considered, and answered hesitatingly :

“ Yes, but it *may* be different. A poet may write for the sake of creating or enriching a literature, where there is none, or it is in danger of dying out. That is a fine-sounding motive, but not a pure one. Then, some poets write for glory—to be famous and crowned with laurels, and to gain smiles from the fair maidens who strew flowers on their path ! ”

“ You must express yourself more exactly,” said the hermit, “ and not desecrate terms that

are held so sacred. For poets who sing for such reasons are no poets at all. A poet sings because he sings. He cannot sing with any given purpose, or he becomes an amateur."

"But, Father, supposing a poet *has* sung as simply as a bird, can he afterwards take pleasure in the laurels and the roses? Can he be jealous of those who gain rewards which he believes to be due to himself? Can he belie his convictions and deny beauty, because he is opposed to those who created it? Can he praise what he knows to be bad for the sake of possible advantage? Can he affect a pose of unconventionality in order to gain prominence through eccentricity? Can he think himself better than the common run of men? Can he shake the hands of the mob which applauds him? Can he hate those who ridicule him instead of honouring him? How do you explain all this? It all seems to me so incompatible with the simplicity of the little bird and the great sea!"

"All these questions, my young friend, are an answer to *my* question," he replied; "for they are a proof that there are not many poets in your country. Remember that I use the term 'poet' in its purest, highest sense. A poet can only

live for his art, which he loves for itself, and not as a means to secure fleeting earthly pleasures. A poet looks upon men and things—in their nature and relationship—so simply, that he himself approaches very nearly to the nature of Tao. Other men see men and things hazily, as if through a fog. The poet realizes this as an incontestable fact. How, then, can he expect his simplicity to be understood by the confused mind of the public? How can he cherish feelings of hate and grief when it ridicules him? How can he feel any pleasure when it does him honour? It is the same in this case as with the four ‘seasons’ of Chuang-Tse. There is nothing specially agitating in it all, because it is the natural course of things. So the poet is neither in despair when he is ignored, nor pleased when he is fêted. He looks upon the way the public behaves towards him as a natural consequence, of which he knows the cause. The judgment of the common people is not even so much as indifferent to him—it simply does not exist for him. He does not sing his verses for the sake of the people, but because he cannot help himself. The sound of human comment on his work escapes him entirely, and he knows not whether he be famous or forgotten.

'The highest fame is no fame.'* You look at me, young man, as though I were telling stranger things than you ever dared to dream of. But I am only telling the plainest truth, simple and natural as the truth in landscape or sea. Having lived till so lately in the midst of the strenuous life of your countrymen, you have never yet seen true simplicity. For so long you have heard nothing spoken of but 'fame,' 'earnings,' 'honour,' 'artists,' and 'immortality,' that, for all you know, these things may be indispensable as air, and real as your soul. But it is all an illusion and deception. Those whom you have seen may indeed have been poets of true fibre, but they had lapsed from the Tao-born impulse which was their life-principle, and they did not remain what they were, but sank through their weakness to the nature of commonplace men. So that they have come to do as ordinary men do, only they do it more strongly. So much do I gather from your questioning. But all these are poets no longer, and will sing no more true poetry so long as they remain as they are. For the smallest deviation from the original impulse is enough to kill the poetry within them. There is but the

* From the "Nan Hwa King," chap. xviii.

one direct way : single and simple as a maiden—uncompromising as a straight line. This straight line is spontaneity ; outside it lie false activity, artificiality, and the roads to name and fame, where occur murder and sudden death, and where one bosom friend will suck the life-blood from another to further the attainment of his own ends. The straight line cuts its own way, without deviation or secret windings, into infinity.

“ So you see, all those conditions under which the artist might become a victim to the persecution of the mob fall away of themselves. You have probably read, in the history both of your country and my own, of poets who have died of grief at want of recognition, or who have taken their own lives on account of undeserved ridicule. I have always felt the pathos of this, but I have realized that to such as these the term truly great cannot be applied.

“ And I am speaking, of course, not of the artists of speech only, but of all artists. Shall I show you now something by an artist who was as true and simple-minded as it is possible to conceive a man to be ?—Come with me then ! ”

He led me into a small room in his hut—a cell with white walls, and no furniture, save the bed,

a table covered with books, and a few chairs. He opened a door in the wall, and drew out from it a wooden chest. This he carried as carefully as though it had been some sacred object or a little child. He set it gently down upon the floor, opened the lid, and lifted out a closed shrine of red-brown wood, which he placed upon the table.¹²

"Look," he remarked, "this is a beautiful shrine, to begin with. A beautiful thing must have a beautiful setting. At present the little doors are shut. Do you not find this a goodly idea: to be able always to hide it from profane eyes in this way? But before *you* I may well open it."

And the two wings of the shrine flew apart.

Against a background of pale blue silk appeared a large figure, gleaming, and shimmering, with a wonderful radiance of its own. It was the Buddha Kwan Yin, seated upon a lotus that reared itself, straight, and graceful, and modestly opened, above a tumult of wild waves.¹³

"Can you feel the utter simplicity and beauty of this?" he asked me; and his voice thrilled with a great and tender love. "Is not this the very embodiment of rest?—How serene is the face—how wonderfully tender, and yet how tensely grave, with its closed eyes gazing into

infinity ! See—the cheek,—how delicate and tender ! See—the mouth—and the lofty curving of the eyebrows—and the pure pearl gleaming above the forehead “—symbol of a soul taking its flight from the body ! And the body—how few are the lines of it ! Yet see : what infinite love and mercifulness in the droop of the left arm ; and in the uplifted right arm—with two raised fingers, held together as in the act of preaching—what an indescribable holiness ! And how beautiful the repose of the crossed legs resting so softly upon the lotus !—And see—how tenderly felt, notwithstanding the immense strength and restraint of the whole—the delicate soles of the feet, curved with such subtle gentleness !—Is it not the very embodiment of the essence of all Buddhism ? You do not need to have read anything of Buddhism in order to appreciate it now, here, in all its inmost meaning. Is it not perfect Rest—this ideally pure countenance, gazing thus stilly into eternity ? Is it not perfect Love for the world—this simple droop of the arm ? And is not the essence of the whole doctrine grasped and confined in the pose of the uplifted fingers ?

“ And then—the material of which such a

figure as this is made ! Do you realize, I wonder, that an artist such as this must have laboured for years and years before his material became as pure and ethereal as he required it to be ? For the nature of stone is so hard—is it not ?—and the general idea of it : matter—that would suit but ill for the plastic representation of the ideal conception : Rest.—So the artist wrought upon all kinds of common materials, such as clay, sand, and earth, and transformed them, by means of fit and harmonious combination with precious stones, pearls, and jasper, into costly substances. And so the material for this figure became something that was no longer material, but rather the incarnation of a sublime idea. The artist wanted to symbolize, too, in his representation, the rosy dawn which broke upon mankind on the appearance of Buddha ; and so, shimmering through the snowy white of his porcelain, he introduced just such a subtle, rosy glow as plays upon the morning clouds before the glory of the sun bursts forth. Is not this half-realized, growing light more instinct with feeling than light itself ? Can you perceive this indefinite, yet clear and rosy colour, shimmering throughout the white ? Is it not chaste as the first soft

blush on the white forehead of a maiden ? Is it not the godly love of the artist that we see thus glowing in the pure whiteness ? Such a figure is, in fact, no longer a figure. The idea of material is entirely obliterated ; it is a miracle."

For a long time I was too much moved to speak. The purifying beauty of this work of art stirred my soul even more deeply than the pure wisdom of the old philosopher. At last I asked gently :

"Who created this marvellous thing ? I would like to know, so that I may always keep his name with yours in reverent remembrance."

"That is of very little importance, my young friend !" he answered. "The soul that was in this artist is absorbed again into Tao, just as yours will be one day. His body has fallen away, like the leaves from a tree, just as yours, in time, will fall away. Then what weight can one attach to his name ? But I will tell it you ; he was called Ch'ên Wei,¹⁵ and he engraved this name in finely designed characters upon the back of the figure, as was the custom at that time. Who was he ? Just a common workman, of course, who did not even know, himself, that he was an artist ; who considered himself nothing more than a simple peasant, and had not the

least suspicion that his work was so beautiful. But he must have gazed much at the heavens and clouds above him, and have loved the wide seas, and the landscapes, and the flowers ; otherwise he could not have been so fine in feeling ; for such simple lines and pure colours are only found in Nature. He was certainly not celebrated ; you will not find his name in any history. I could not tell you where he came from, nor how he lived, nor to what age. I know only that it is more than four hundred years since such figures as these were made, and that connoisseurs reckon that this one dates from the first half of the Ming Dynasty. Most probably the artist lived quite quietly the same sort of life as the other people, worked industriously as a common labourer, and died humbly, unconscious of his own greatness. But his work remained, and this image, by a fortunate chance, found its way to this district, which the last wars did not touch, and is still the same as when he made it. And thus it may last on for centuries and centuries, in inextinguishable radiance, in maidenly majesty. O, to create such a thing as this, in pure, unconscious simplicity—that is to be a poet ! That is the art which dates not from time but from

eternity! How beautiful! Is it not? This porcelain, that is almost indestructible; this radiance, which never dies away! Here it stands, upon the earth, so strong and yet so tender; and so it will still be, long after our successors are dead! And the soul of the artist is with Tao!"

We looked at the image for a long time. Then he took careful hold of the shrine once more.

"It is so delicate," he said, "that I hardly dare to expose it to broad daylight. For this miracle of tenderness—ethereal as a soul—the daylight is too hard. I feel a kind of anxiety lest the light should suddenly break it in pieces; or cause it to dissolve like a little light cloud—so wholly soul-like is its composition!"

And gently, very gently, he replaced the shrine within the chest, which he closed.

He went out now, before me, and we seated ourselves again beneath the overhanging rock.

"How beautiful it would be," I said, "if everyone could make things like that, in all simplicity, and surround themselves with them, everywhere!"

"Everyone!" he answered; "well, that is perhaps too much to expect! But there really

was once a time when this great kingdom was one big temple of art and beauty. You may still see the traces of it here in China. At that time the greater number of the people were simple-minded artists. All objects surrounding them were beautiful, the smallest thing as well as the greatest—whether it were a temple, a garden, a table, a chair, or a knife. Just examine the little tea-cups, or the smallest censers of that period ! The poorest coolie ate out of vessels as perfect in their way as my Kwan-Yin image. All objects were beautifully made, and involuntarily so. The simple artisans did not consider themselves ‘artists,’ or in any way different from their fellow-men, and no petty strife can have arisen between them, otherwise there would have been an end of their art. Everything was beautiful because they were all single-minded and worked honestly. It was as natural in those days for things to be beautiful as it is nowadays for them to be ugly. The art of China has sunk to its lowest ebb ; that is a consequence of its miserable social condition. You have surely remarked that the art of the country is deteriorating. And that is a death-sign for this great Empire. For Art is inseparably connected with

the full bloom of a country's life. If the art declines, then the whole country degenerates. I do not mean this in the political, but rather in the moral sense. For a morally strong and simple-hearted people brings forth involuntarily a strong and healthy art.—Yes, what you said is true; how much better men's lives would be if they could only create for themselves better surroundings! And how extraordinary that this is not done! For Nature remains ever and everywhere accessible to them. See the clouds—the trees—the sea!”

The sea was still, as ever, splashing at our feet—boundless and pure. Clouds sailed majestically landwards, with a slow motion, in the full blaze of the light. Golden gleams, falling upon the mountains, vanished again with the rhythmic sweep of the clouds. Light and motion, sound and play of colour, everywhere!

The hermit gazed calmly and confidently at this infinite loveliness, as though deeply conscious of the intimate relationship existing between him and all his surroundings. He seemed to guess what was in my mind as I looked at him, for he said:

“We fit as naturally into this beauty around

us as a tree or a mountain. If we can but remain so, we shall always retain the feeling of our own well-being, midst all the great workings of the world-system. So much has been said about human life ; and scholars have created such an endless labyrinth of theories ! And yet in its inmost kernel it is as plain as Nature. All things are equal in simplicity, and nothing is really in confusion, however often it may seem as though it were so. Everything moves as surely and inevitably as the sea."

There rang in his voice both the love of the poet and the assurance of the scholar who takes his stand upon incontestable truth.

"Are you satisfied for to-day ?" was his friendly question ; "and have I helped you a little ? Do you feel more clearly now what poetry is ?"

"Father," I answered, "your wisdom is poetry, and your poetry is wisdom ! How is that ?"

"That is quite true from your point of view," he answered. "But you still have to learn that all these words are only a formula. I do not know what my wisdom is, nor my poetry. It is all one. It is so simple and natural, when once you understand this ! It is all Tao."

LOVE

CHAPTER III

LOVE

It was evening once more. We were resting again upon the soft turf of the mountain-side, the quietness of our mood in sympathy with the solemn stillness of twilight. The distant mountain-ranges reposed in an atmosphere breathing reverence and devotion, as though kneeling motionless to receive the slow-descending blessing of night. The lonely trees dotted here and there about the hills stood motionless too, in a pause of silent worshipping. The sound of the sea was distant and indistinct, lost in its own vastness. Peace reigned, and dreamy sounds ascended, as of prayer.

The hermit stood before me, stately as a tree in the midst of Nature, and awe-inspiring as the evening itself.

I had returned to question him again. For my soul found no repose apart from him, and a mighty impulse was stirring within me. But now that I found myself near him, I hardly

dared to speak ; and indeed it seemed as though words were no longer needed—as though everything lay, of itself, open and clear as daylight. How goodly and simple everything appeared that evening ! I recognized my own inmost being in all the beauty around me, with a dreamy sense of its drifting into the Infinite.

But I broke in at last upon this train of thought, and cleft the peaceful silence with my voice :

“ Father,” I said sadly, “ all your words have sunk into my mind, and my soul is filled with the balm of them. It is no longer my own soul ; no longer what it was. It is as though I were dead ; yet, day and night, something—I know not what—is taking place within me, causing a strange vacancy and lightness in my mind. Father, I know it is Tao ; it is death, and glorious resurrection ; but it is not love ; and without love, Tao appears to me but a gloomy lie.”

The old man looked round him at the evening scene, and smiled gently.

“ What is love ? ” he asked calmly. “ Are you sure about that, I wonder ? ”

“ No, I am not sure,” I answered. “ I do not know anything about it, but that is just the reason of its great blessedness. Yes, oh ! do but

let me express it ! I mean : love of a maiden, love of a woman. I remember yet, Father, what it was to me when I saw the maiden, and my soul knew delight for the first time. It was like a sea, like a broad heaven, like death. It was light—and I had been blind ! It hurt, Father—my heart beat so violently—and my eyes burned. The world was a fire, and all things were strange, and began to live. It was a great flame flaring from out my soul. It was so fearful, but so lovely, and so infinitely great ! Father, I think it was greater than Tao ! ”

“ I know well what it was,” said the sage. “ It was Beauty, the earthly form of the formless Tao on earth, calling up in you the rhythm of that movement by which you will enter into Tao. You might have experienced the same at sight of a tree, a cloud, or a flower. But because you are human, living by desire, therefore to *you* it could only be revealed through another human being, a woman—because, too, that form is to you more easily understood, and more familiar. And as passion overmastered pure contemplation, the rhythm within you was wrought up into a wild tempest, like a fierce flood that knows not whither it is tending. The inmost

spring of the whole emotion was not 'love,' but Tao."

But the calmness of the old philosopher made me feel impatient, and excited me to answer roughly :

"It is easy to theorize like this, but seeing that you have never experienced it yourself, you cannot really understand what you are speaking of ! "

He looked at me steadily, and laid his hand sympathetically on my shoulder.

"It would be cruel, if you spoke thus to any one but me, young man !—I knew what it was to love, before you drew breath in this world ! At that time a maiden was living, so wonderful to look upon that she seemed like the direct-born expression of Tao. For me she was the world, and the world lay dead around her. I saw nothing but her, and for me there existed no such things as trees, or people, or clouds. She was more beautiful than this evening scene, gentler than the lines of those distant mountains, more tender than those hushed tree-tops ; and the light of her presence was more blessed to see than the still shining of yonder star. I will not tell you her story. It was crueller than hell—but it was not

real, and it is over now, like a storm that has passed. It seemed to me that I must die ; I longed to flee from my pain into death. But there came a dawning in my soul, and all grew light and comprehensible. Nothing was lost. All was yet as it had been. The beauty which I had believed taken from me lived on still, spotless, in myself. For it was from my own soul, rather than from the woman, that this beauty had sprung ; and this I saw, shining yet with an everlasting radiance, all over the world. Nature was no other than what I had fashioned to myself out of that shadowy form of a woman. And my soul was one with Nature, and floated with a like rhythm towards the eternal Tao."

His calmness calmed me, and I said : " She whom *I* loved is dead, Father. She who culled my soul as a child culls a flower never became my wife. But I have a wife now, a miracle of strength and goodness, essential to me as light and air. I do not love her as I even now love her who died. But I know that she is a purer human being than that other. How is it then that I do *not* love her so much ? She has transformed my wild and troubled life into a tranquil march towards death. She is simple and true as

Nature itself, and her face is dear to me as the sunlight."

"You love her, indeed!" said the sage, "but you know not what love means, nor loving. I will tell it you. Love is no other than the rhythm of Tao. I have told you: you are come out of Tao, and to Tao you will return. Whilst you are young—with your soul still enveloped in darkness—in the shock of the first impulse within you, you do not know yet whither you are trending. You see the woman before you. You believe her to be that towards which the rhythm is driving you. But even when the woman is yours, and you have thrilled at the touch of her, you feel the rhythm yet within you, unappeased, and know that you must forward, ever further, if you would bring it to a standstill. Then it is that in the souls of the man and woman there arises a great sadness, and they look at one another, questioning whither they are now bound. Gently they clasp one another by the hand, and move on through life, swayed by the same impulse, towards the same goal. Call this love if you will. What is a name? I call it Tao. And the souls of those who love are like two white clouds floating softly side by side, that vanish, wafted

by the same wind, into the infinite blue of the heavens."

"But that is not the love that I mean!" I cried. "Love is not the desire to see the loved one absorbed into Tao; love is the longing to be always with her; the deep yearning for the blending of the two souls in one; the hot desire to soar, in one breath with her, into felicity! And this always with the loved one alone—not with others, not with Nature. And were I absorbed into Tao, all this happiness would be for ever lost! Oh let me stay here, in this goodly world, with my faithful companion! Here it is so bright and homely, and Tao is still so gloomy and inscrutable for me."

"The bodily desire dies out," he answered calmly. "The body of your loved one will wither and pass away within the cold earth. The leaves of the trees fade in autumn, and the withered flowers droop sadly to the ground. How can you love that so much which does not last? However, you know, in truth, as yet, neither how you love nor what it is that you love. The beauty of woman is but a vague reflection of the formless beauty of Tao. The emotion it awakens, the longing to lose yourself in her

beauty, that ecstasy of feeling which would lend wings for the flight of your soul with the beloved—beyond horizon-bounds, into regions of bliss—believe me, it is no other than the rhythm of Tao ; only you know it not. You are still like the river which only knows, as yet, its shimmering banks, and has no knowledge of the power that draws it forward ; but which will one day inevitably flow out into the great ocean. Why this striving after happiness, after human happiness, that lasts but a moment and then vanishes again ? Chuang-Tse said truly : ‘The highest happiness is no happiness.’ Is it not small and pitiable, this momentary uprising, and downfalling, and uprising again ? this wavering, weakly intention and progress of men ? Do not seek happiness in a woman. She is the joyful revelation of Tao directed towards you. She is the purest form in the whole of Nature by which Tao is manifested. She is the gentle force that awakens the rhythm of Tao within you. But she is only a poor creature like yourself. And you are for her the same joyful revelation that she is to you. Do not fancy that that which you perceive in her is the Tao, that very holiest, into which you would one day ascend ! For then you would

surely reject her when you realized what she was. If you will truly love a woman, then love her as being of the same poor nature as yourself, and do not seek happiness with her. Whether in your love you see this or not—her inmost being is Tao. A poet looks upon a woman, and, swayed by the 'rhythm,' he perceives the beauty of the beloved in all things—in the trees, the mountains, and the horizon; for the beauty of a woman is the same as that of Nature. It is the form of Tao, the great and formless, and what your soul desires in the excitement of beholding—this strange, unspeakable feeling—is nothing but your oneness with this beauty, and with the source of this beauty—Tao. And the like is felt by your wife. Ye are for each other angels, who lead one another to Tao unconsciously."

I was silent for a while, reflecting. In the soft colouring and stillness of the evening lay a great sadness. Above the horizon, where the sun had set, there glimmered a streak of faint red light, like dying pain.

"What is this sadness, then, everywhere in Nature?" I asked. "Is there not in the twilight a feeling as though the whole earth were weeping with a grievous longing? See how she

mourns, with these fading hues, these drooping tree-tops, and solemn mountains. All human eyes must fill with tears, when this great grief of Nature looms within their sight. It is as though she were longing for her beloved—as though everything—seas, mountains, and heavens—were full of mourning.”

And the sage replied: “It is the same pain which cries in the hearts of men. Your own longing quivers in Nature too. The ‘Heimweh’ of the evening is also the ‘Heimweh’ of your soul. Your soul has lost her love: Tao, with whom she once was one; and your soul longs for reunion with her love. Absolute reunion with Tao—is not that an immense love?—to be so absolutely one with the beloved that you are wholly hers, she wholly yours; and that neither death nor life can ever cleave your oneness again! to be so tranquil and pure that desire can no more awaken in you—perfect blessedness being attained, and a holy and permanent peace!

“For Tao is one single, eternal, pure infinitude of soul.

“Is that not more perfect than the love of a woman?—this poor, sad love, each day of which

reveals to you some sullying of the clear life of the soul by dark and sanguine passion? Only when you are absorbed into Tao will you be completely, eternally united with the soul of your beloved, with the souls of all men, your brothers, and with the soul of Nature. The few moments of blessedness fleetingly enjoyed by all lovers on earth are as nothing in comparison with that endless bliss: the blending of the souls of all who love in an eternity of perfect purity."

An horizon of blessedness opened out before my soul, wider than the vague horizon of the sea, wider than the heavens.

"Father!" I cried in ecstasy, "can it be that everything is so holy, and I have never known it? I have been so filled with longing, and so worn out with weeping; and my breast has been heavy with sobs and dread. I have been so consumed with fear! I have trembled at the thought of death! I have despaired of all being right, when I saw so much suffering around me. I have believed myself damned by reason of the wild passions and bodily desires that burnt within me and would burst out—passions which, though I hated them, I still was coward enough to serve. With what breathless horror I have realized how

the tender, flower-like body of my love must have mouldered and crumbled away in the cold, dark earth ! I have believed that I should never feel again that blessed peace at the look in her eyes, through which her soul was shining. And was it Tao ?—was Tao really even then always within me, like a faithful guardian ? and was it Tao that shone from her eyes ? Was Tao in everything that surrounded me ?—in the clouds, the trees, and the sea ? Is the inmost being of earth and heaven, then, also the inmost being of my beloved and my own soul ? Is it *that* for which there burns within me that mysterious longing which I did not understand, and which drove me so restlessly onward ? I thought it was leading me away from the beloved, and that I was ceasing to love her !—Was it really the rhythm of Tao, then, that moved my beloved too ?—the same as that in which all Nature breathes, and all suns and planets take their shining course throughout eternity ?—Then all is indeed made holy !—then Tao is indeed in everything, as my soul is in Tao ! Oh, Father, Father ! it is growing so light in my heart ! My soul seems to foresee all that will come one day ; and the heavens above us, and the great sea, they

foretell it too! See, how reverently the trees around us are standing—and see the lines of the mountains, how soft they are in their holy repose! All Nature is filled with sacred awe, and my soul too thrills with ecstasy, for she has looked upon her beloved!”

I sat there long, in silent, still forgetfulness. It was to me as though I were one with the soul of my master and with Nature. I saw nothing and heard nothing;—void of all desire, bereft of all will, I lay sunk in the deepest peace. I was awakened by a soft sound close by me. A fruit had fallen from the tree to the ground behind us. When I looked up, it was into shimmering moonlight. The recluse was standing by me, and bent over me kindly.

“You have overstrained your spirit, my young friend!” he said concernedly. “It is too much for you in so short a time. You have fallen asleep from exhaustion. The sea sleeps too. See, not a furrow breaks its even surface; calmly dreaming, it receives the benediction of the light. But you must wake! It is late, your boat is ready, and your wife awaits you at home in the town.”

I answered, still half dreaming: “I would so

gladly stay here ! Let me return, with my wife, and stay here for ever ! I cannot go back to the people again ! Ah, Father, I shudder—I can see their scoffing faces, their insulting glances, their disbelief, and their irreverence ! How can I keep this wonderful, light and tender feeling in the midst of that ungracious people ? How can I ever so hide it under smile or speech that they shall never detect it, nor desecrate it with their scornful taunts ? ”

Then, laying his hand earnestly upon my shoulder, he said :

“ Listen carefully to what I say now, my friend, and, above all, *believe* me. I shall give you pain, but I cannot help it. You *must* return to the world and your fellow-men ; it cannot be otherwise. You have spoken too much with me already ; perhaps I have said somewhat too much to you. Your further growth must be your own doing, and you must find out everything for yourself. Be only simple of heart, and you will discover everything without effort, like a child finding flowers. At this moment you feel deeply and purely what I have said to you. This present mood is one of the highest moments of your life. But you cannot yet be strong enough to main-

tain it. You will relapse, and spiritual feeling will turn again to words and theories. Only by slow degrees will you grow once more to feel it purely and keep it permanently. When that is so, then you may return hither in peace, and then you will do well to remain here ;—but by that time I shall be long dead.

“ You must complete your growth in the midst of life, not outside it ; for you are not yet pure enough to rise above it. A moment ago, it is true, you were equal even to that, but the reaction will soon set in. You must not shun the rest of mankind ; they are your equals, even though they may not feel so purely as you do. You can go amongst them as their comrade, and take them by the hand ; only do not let them look upon your soul, so long as they are still so far behind you. They would not mock you from wickedness, but rather out of religious persuasion, being unaware how utterly miserable, how godless, how forsaken they are, and how far from all those holy things by which you actually live. You must be so strong in your conviction that nothing can hinder you. And that you will only become after a long and bitter struggle. But out of your tears will grow your strength, and through pain

you will attain peace. Above all, remember that Tao, Poetry and Love are One and the Same, although you may seek to define It by these several vague terms; that It is always within you and around you; that It never forsakes you; and that you are safe and well cared for in this holy environment. You are surrounded with benefits, and sheltered by a love which is eternal. Everything is made holy through the primal force of Tao dwelling within it."

He spoke so gently and convincingly that I had no answer to give. Willingly I allowed myself to be guided by him to the shore. My boat lay motionless upon the smooth water, awaiting me.

"Farewell, my young friend! Farewell!" he said, calmly and tenderly. "Remember all that I have told you!"

But I could not leave him in such a manner. Suddenly I thought of the loneliness of his life in this place, and tears of sympathy rose to my eyes. I grasped his hand.

"Father, come with me!" I besought him. "My wife and I will care for you; we will do everything for you; and when you are sick we will tend you. Do not stay here in this loneli-

ness, so devoid of all the love that might make life sweet to you ! ”

He smiled gently, and shook his head as a father might at some fancy of his child's, answering with tranquil kindness :

“ You have lapsed already ! Do you realize now how necessary it is for you to remain in the midst of the everyday life ? I have but this moment told you how great is the love which surrounds me—and still you deem me lonely here and forsaken ? Here, in Tao, I am as safe at home as a child is with its mother. You mean it well, my friend, but you must grow wiser, much wiser ! Be not concerned for me ; that is unnecessary, grateful though I am to you for this feeling. Think of yourself just now. And do what I say. Believe that I tell you what is best for you. In the boat lies something to remind you of the days you have spent here. Farewell ! ”

I bent silently over his hand and kissed it. I thought I felt that it trembled with emotion ; but when I looked at him again his face was calm and cheerful as the moon in the sky.

I stepped into the boat, and the boatman took up the oars. With dexterous strokes he drove it

over the calm surface of the water. I was already some way from the land when my foot struck against an object in the boat, and I remembered that something for me was lying there. I took it up. It was a small chest. Hastily I lifted the lid. And in the soft, calm moonlight there gleamed with mystical radiance the wonderful porcelain of the Kwan-Yin image, the same which the old man had cherished so carefully, and loved so well.

There, in the lofty tranquillity of severe yet gentle lines, in all the ethereal delicacy of the transparent porcelain, reposed the pure figure of Kwan-Yin, shining as if with spiritual radiance amidst the shimmering petals of the lotus.

I scarcely dared believe that this holy thing had been given to me. I seized my handkerchief, and waved with it towards the shore, to convey my thanks to the recluse. He stood there motionless, gazing straight before him. I waited longingly for him to wave—for one more greeting from him—one more sign of love—but he remained immovable.

Was it I after whom he was gazing ? Was he gazing at the sea ? . . .

I closed the lid of the chest, and held it closely

to me, as though it had been a love of his which I was bearing away. I knew now that he cared for me; but his imperturbable calm was too great for me—it saddened my mood that he had never signed to me again.

We drew further and further away; the outlines of his figure grew fainter and fainter; at last I could see it no more.

He remained; with the dreams of his soul, in the midst of Nature; alone in infinity, bereft of all human love—but close to the great bosom of Tao.

I took my way back to the life amongst mankind, my brothers and equals, in all the souls of whom dwells Tao, primordial and eternal.

The ornamental lights of the harbour gleamed already in the distance, and the drone of the great town sounded nearer and nearer to us over the sea.

Then I felt a great strength in me, and I ordered the boatman to row still more quickly. I was ready. Was I not as safe and well cared for in the great town as in the still country? in the street as on the sea?

In Everything dwells Poetry—Love—Tao. And the whole World is a Great Sanctuary, cherished and safe-guarded like a strong, well-ordered House.

NOTES

1. p. 18. This is a fact. Chinese priests are in the habit of repeating Sutras which, to judge by the sound, have been translated from the Sanscrit into Chinese phrases of which they do not understand one word.

2. p. 21. The "Yellow Emperor" is a legendary emperor, who appears to have reigned about the year 2697 B.C.

3. p. 21. That which follows in inverted commas is an extract translated from the twelfth chapter of the "Nan Hwa King."

4. p. 22. The following passage, as far as the sentence "and the Millions return again into One" is an adaptation—not a translation—of the first section of "Tao-Teh-King." Lao-Tse's wonderfully simple writing cannot possibly be translated into equally simple passages in our language. This rendering of mine—arrived at partly by aid of Chinese commentators—is an entirely new reading, and is, to the best of my knowledge, the true one. One of the most celebrated, and, in a certain sense, one of the most competent of the sinologues, Herbert Giles, translates of this first section only the first sentence, and finds

the rest not worth the trouble of translating! (Compare "The Remains of Lao Tzü," by H. A. Giles, Hongkong, *China Mail Office*, 1886.) This same scholar translates "Tao" as "the Way," not perceiving how impossible it is that which Lao-Tse meant—the Highest of all, the Infinite—should be a "way," seeing that a way (in the figurative sense) always leads to something else, and therefore cannot be the Highest. Another still more celebrated sinologue, Dr. Legge, translates "Tao" as "Course," and out of the simple sentence: "If Tao could be expressed in words it would not be the eternal Tao" he makes: "The Course that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging course." The whole secret is this: that the sign or word "Tao" has a great number of meanings, and that in Confucius's work "Chung Yung" it does as a matter of fact mean "Way"; but in a hundred other instances it means: "speech, expression, a saying." Lao-Tse having, in one sentence, used this sign in two different senses, nearly all translators have suffered themselves to be misled. The sentence is as simple as possible, and in two of my Chinese editions the commentators put: "spoken," and: "by word of mouth." But of all the sinologues only Wells Williams has translated this sentence well, namely thus: "The Tao which can be expressed is not the eternal Tao." Although the construction of the phrase

is not accurately rendered, at any rate Williams has grasped the meaning.

After my work had already appeared in the periodical *De Gids*, I saw for the first time Professor de Groot's work "Jaarlijksche feesten en gebruiken der Emoy Chineezen," from which I gathered that he agreed with me in so far as to say also that "Tao" was untranslatable—a sub-lying conception "for which the Chinese philosopher himself could find no name, and which he consequently stamped with the word "Tao." Professor de Groot adds: "If one translates this word by 'the universal soul of Nature,' 'the all-pervading energy of Nature,' or merely by the word 'Nature' itself, one will surely not be far from the philosopher's meaning."

Although the term holds for me something still higher, yet I find Professor de Groot's conception of it the most sympathetic of all those known to me.

5. p. 26. This "Wu-Wei"—untranslatable as it is in fact—has been rendered by these sinologues as "*inaction*"—as though it signified idleness, inertia. It most certainly does not signify idleness, however, but rather *action*, activity—that is to say: "inactivity of the perverted, unnatural passions and desires," but "activity in the sense of natural movement proceeding from Tao." Thus, in the "Nan Hwa King" we find the following: "The heavens and the earth do nothing" (in the evil sense) "and"

(yet) "there is nothing which they do not do." The whole of nature consists in "Wu-Wei," in natural; from-Tao-emanating movement. By translating Wu-Wei into "inaction" the sinologues have arrived at the exact opposite of the meaning of the Chinese text.

Lao-Tse himself does not dilate further upon the subject. What follows here is my own conception of the sense of the text. The whole first chapter of the original occupies only one page in the book, and contains only fifty-nine characters. It testifies to Lao-Tse's wonderful subtlety and terseness of language that he was able in so few words to say so much.

6. p. 27. This sentence is translated from the "Tao-Teh-King" (chapter 2).

7. p. 27. From the 56th chapter. This sentence is also to be found in the 15th chapter of the "Nan Hwa King."

8. p. 34. This runs somewhat as follows in the 6th chapter of the Nan Hwa King: "The true men of the early ages slept dreamlessly, and were conscious of self without care."

9. p. 36. This episode is translated from the 18th section of the "Nan Hwa King." By the "Great House" Chuang-Tse meant, of course, the universe, and this expression "house" lends to the passage a touch of familiar intimacy, showing Chuang-Tse to have the feeling that the dead one was well cared for

as though within the shelter of a house. H. Giles, who renders it "Eternity," which does not appear at all in the Chinese text, loses by his translation the confiding element which makes Chuang-Tse's speech so touching. (Compare "Chuang Tsy," by H. Giles, London, Bernard Quaritch, 1889.) The actual words are : "Ku Shih" = Great House.

10. p. 38. In almost all the temples is a chamber in which the Mandarins lodge, and where Western travellers may usually stay for the night, and probably for longer periods.

11. p. 43. The following, to the end of the sentence, "Poetry then, is the sound of the heart," has been translated by me from a preface by Wang Yao Ki to his edition of the Poetry of the Tang Dynasty. Wang Yao Ki lived in the first half of the eighteenth century.

12. p. 54. The Chinese do really preserve their treasures in this careful manner. It is usual for an antique figure of Buddha to lie in a silk-lined shrine, the shrine in a wooden chest, and the chest in a cloth. It is unpacked upon great occasions.

13. p. 54. Such a figure as the above-described is not a mere figment of the author's imagination—such figures really exist. A similar one is in the possession of the author.

14. p. 55. The Soul-Pearl "Oerna," a spiritual eye.

15. p. 57. The figure in the author's possession is by Ch'ên Wei. Another great artist was Ho Chao Tsung, of certain figures by whom I have also, with very great trouble, become possessed. These names are well known to every artist, but I have endeavoured in vain to discover anything nearer with regard to them. They became famous after death ; but they had lived in such simplicity and oblivion, that now not even their birthplace is remembered. I have heard conjectures, but cannot obtain any definite information.







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